DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 276 974 CS 008 613

AUTHOR McKinney, Kay, Ed.
TITLE How to Become a Nation of Readers. Research in Brief.
INSTITUTION National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Jun 85
NOTE 3p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; *Parent Participation; *Parent Student Relationship; *Reading Improvement; *Reading Instruction; Reading Research; *Reading Skills; Reading Strategies; Teaching Methods; *Textbook Preparation
IDENTIFIERS *Becoming a Nation of Readers

ABSTRACT

Presented in three sections, this document contains recommendations based on the conclusions drawn in the Commission on Reading's final report "Becoming a Nation of Readers." Results reported generally indicate that many of America's students could become skilled readers if (1) teachers improved reading instruction, (2) parents spent more time reading with their children, and (3) textbooks were improved. The first section presents the panel's recommendations for teachers; namely, that they renew the emphasis on phonics and reading aloud in the classroom and sharply cut the time spent on workbook activities, replacing it with independent reading time. The second section asserts the importance of parents in laying the foundation for their children's reading abilities and suggests various ways that parents can help their children achieve these skills, including reading aloud to children, discussing stories by asking thought-provoking questions, and encouraging independent reading. The final section presents the panel's conclusion that those who produce textbooks rely too heavily on readability formulas and should, instead, take into consideration clarity, organization, interest, literary quality, and accuracy. (JD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED276974

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

U.S. Department of Education

The National Institute of Education

RESEARCH IN BRIEF

Emerson Elliott, Acting Director

William Bennett, Secretary

How to Become a Nation of Readers

Many of this nation's students are not skilled readers, but they could be if more teachers change the way they teach reading, if parents spend more time reading to their children, and if textbooks are improved.

These are some of the conclusions the Commission on Reading reached after a two-year study of reading and how it is taught in this country. Funded by the National Institute of Education (NIE), this study is especially important because reading is one of the most fundamental of the basic skills, yet many American students are poor readers.

For example, the National Center for Education Statistics reports that 16 percent of the students who enter college are such poor readers they have to take remedial reading courses.

In its final report, 'Becoming a Nation of Readers,' the Commission concluded that if educators would do for all students what some teachers do for some students, the United States could, indeed, become a nation of readers. The study, developed by the National Academy of Education for NIE, was conducted by a nine-member panel of nationally recognized reading experts. Dr. Richard C. Anderson, professor and director of the NIE-supported Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois, chaired the Commission.

TEACHERS

The panel had several recommendations for teachers. In the area of phonics, an issue debated by educators for several years, the Commission notes that phonics is crucial to learning how to read, that it should be taught early (it should be completed by the end of the second grade) and kept simple. Classroom research shows that on the average, children who are taught phonics get off to a better start in learning to read than children who are not taught phonics.

Reading aloud -- by both teacher and child -- is another strategy advocated by the Commission. Teachers who read good stories whet the appetites of their students for reading. It also is important that teachers give beginning readers plenty of opportunities to read aloud. The Commission stresses, however, that silent reading should go hand in hand with oral reading. Although reading authorities recommend that children read a selection silently before reading it aloud, classroom observations indicate this is seldom done. In the Commission's view this is like asking an actor to perform a play before he's seen the script.

For a child to get the most from oral reading, it is important that a teacher know how to handle the child's mistakes. If a student makes many mistakes, this usually means the selection is too difficult and the child should be given an easier one. Otherwise, the Commission recommends that a teacher ignore most oral reading mistakes, unless the mistake changes the meaning of the text. When that happens, the Commission suggests the teacher wait to see whether the child can come up with the right words without help. If not, the teacher should give the child clues about the word's pronunciation or meaning.

The Commission also criticized the amount of time students spend on workbook activities. Although there is little evidence that such activities improve reading skills, students spend up to 70 percent of their reading time on workbook assignments.

The Commission believes these assignments should be cut to the minimum and teachers should concentrate instead on tasks, such as writing, that will actually improve reading skills. Research shows that

CS008613

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
WASHINGTON D.C. 20208

OFFICIAL BUSINESS
PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE, $300

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

POSTAGE AND FEES PAID
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
ED 395

writing helps students improve in phonics, spelling, vocabulary development and reading comprehension. Yet children don't get many opportunities to write. The Commission suggests teachers assign writing in place of some of the workbook assignments that now take up so much time.

Independent reading also can replace some workbook assignments. Research shows that independent reading contributes significantly to reading achievement gains. However, students in a typical primary school class generally spend 40 minutes a week on silent reading. The Commission believes that by the time they are in the third or fourth grade, children should be reading independently at least two hours a week.

PARENTS

It is up to parents to lay the foundation for learning to read. The best way to do this, according to the Commission, is to read aloud to children. This is especially important during the preschool years. The benefits are greatest when the child participates by discussing stories, learning to identify letters and words, and talking about the meaning of words.

One way parents can get their children hooked on books is by reading stories that interest them. Preschoolers especially enjoy hearing the same story read over and over again.

The Commission suggests parents discuss the story by asking thought-provoking questions (such as 'why did you enjoy the story?') rather than 'yes' or 'no' questions. In-depth questions require children to use their memories, reflect on experiences, learn to give detailed descriptions and tell complete stories. All of these abilities help a child learn to read.

The Commission also recommends that parents, like teachers, encourage independent reading by planning weekly visits to the library, suggesting reading as a leisure time activity, or setting aside an established reading hour every day. Research shows that children who are avid readers come from homes in which reading is encouraged.

TEXTBOOKS

Both the writer who writes textbooks and the school administrator who buys them face a difficult job: matching the difficulty level of the material to the ability level of the child. In response to this dilemma, 'readability formulas' have been developed. The typical formula focuses on the length of the sentences and the complexity of the words used. Since it is easy to apply and gives a fairly good prediction of how difficult typical students will find a book, many schools depend on it to appraise a book. Likewise, publishing companies, in order to sell their textooks, write to fit the formula.

Many publishers, however, rely too much on these formulas, the Commissions says. This often results in poorly written school books. In addition to the appropriate and wise use of readability formulas, the Commission urges those who buy books and those who write and edit them to take several other things into consideration, such as clarity, organization, interest, literary quality and accuracy. This applies to subject textbooks (history, science, etc.) as well as to reading books.

* * *

Copies of 'Becoming a Nation of Readers' are available for $4.50 each from The Report of the Commission on Reading, PO Box 2774, Station A, Champaign, Illinois 61820-8774.

* * *

An NIE compendium on language arts is scheduled for publication in late fall. For additional information, write to Dr. Anne Sweet, Teaching and Development, Mail Stop 1806, NIE, 1200 19th Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20208.

* * *

Research in Brief Editor: Kay McKinney, NIE.

June 1985